



Takehaya
Illust:
AsakuraShinji

INVADERS OF THE ROKUTOU!^{MA}!?

Kickstarter Backer Stories Collection 1





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INVADERS OF THE ROKUTOMA!?

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Story 01 — Clariosa Doara

Forthorthe I

Clan's primary complaint against Koutarou was that she felt like the only girl he didn't treasure. She didn't expect to be treated like Harumi or Maki, since Koutarou had good reason to be gentle with them given their personalities and past experiences. But at the very least, Clan thought Koutarou could treat her the same way he did Sanae or Yurika. She was well aware that she was dear to him at this point—she just wished he would show it a little more.

“Ha, I've got it! If I make an AI modeled after Veltlion, I can research how he'll react based on what I do!”

After anguishing over her dilemma for quite some time, Clan suddenly stumbled upon a plan that would capitalize on her strengths: making a dialogue-capable AI in order to research how to deal with Koutarou. Fortunately, she had plenty of data to go off of, so modeling an AI after him would be easy. She didn't have any data on his neurological system specifically, so she couldn't replicate his flashes of brilliance or lapses in logic, but that wasn't the crux of the matter here. She was primarily concerned with his behavioral patterns, and she had just what she needed for that.

“Then let's get right to work...”

Clan extracted all relevant audio and visual recordings in her data bank and synthesized them into her program for making AIs. Forthorthe had a long history with artificial intelligence. They'd surpassed Earth's current technology about a millennium ago, so their AI-making software these days was AI-based itself. An operator still needed to make some final adjustments, but most of the heavy lifting was left to the computer. That meant that all Clan had to do for now was execute the program... and she was practically praying as she pressed the button.

The completed Koutarou AI was more or less a success. When asked a question, it would respond the same way the real Koutarou would over 90 percent of the time. It wasn't perfect, but it was more than enough for Clan, who was simply trying to understand Koutarou better. She just wanted something close to the real thing, and it

seemed she'd accomplished that.

“Why the long face, Clan?”

Perhaps that was why it noticed something was wrong the minute Clan activated it. He realized something was strange with Clan as she timidly wondered how the AI turned out.

“U-Um, it's nothing. I was just thinking about some new technology.”

“You don't say. Well, don't overdo it, okay?”

The AI seemed satisfied with Clan's explanation and walked over to the tea table in the replica room 106. It was just a holographic display of the apartment, but the AI didn't know any better since it was just a hologram itself.

“L-Listen, I... um...”

Clan was flustered. She'd gone to all the trouble of making the AI, so she knew she should take full advantage of it and try behaving differently than she normally did around Koutarou... But she was having a hard time. Fake or not, the AI still resembled Koutarou. Clan would have to be brave.

“What is it?”

“It's nothing. Nothing at all.”

She knew what she had to do. She only needed to cling to him like Sanae, stare at him like Maki, or tease him like Kiriha. But she just couldn't find the courage to try any of those things. She got cold feet when she imagined how poorly he might respond.

I know this isn't the real deal... but if he rejects me, there's a 90% chance the real one will too...

Clan kept making excuses in her head as she went to the computer. The holographic Koutarou then froze—she'd temporarily stopped the simulation in order to change a few parameters. The Koutarou AI would now see her as Sanae, effectively giving her a disguise.

“All right. Now I can just try interacting with him like Sanae does...”

When she was finished making her alterations, Clan rebooted the

AI to begin the experiment.

H-How does Sanae do it again? Let's see...

Contemplating Sanae's demeanor around Koutarou, Clan approached the AI in an attempt to replicate it.

When the real Koutarou returned home that day, Clan was slumped over the tea table for some reason. She looked just like Yurika whenever she failed a test. Puzzled by this, he sat down across from her and poked the top of her head.

“What’s wrong, Clan?”

“Veltlion?!”

When he did, Clan shot straight up in surprise. It seemed she hadn’t heard him enter.

“What are you all startled for? Did something happen?”

“Nothing! I just... ruined an experiment.”

Indeed, it was fair to say the experiment had ended in failure. Even with her digital Sanae disguise, Clan couldn’t bring herself to act like her childish and carefree friend. But that wasn’t the end of it. She’d then tried transforming into Maki and Harumi, and the results were the same. The real problem was clear: it was Clan herself. This experiment had proven that empirically, which came as a shock to Clan herself. Granted, she couldn’t admit all that to Koutarou—so she simplified things by saying she’d ruined an experiment.

“Hahh... No matter what I do, it just doesn’t work...” she lamented, slumping over the tea table once more before falling as still as a frozen hologram.

“...”

It was clear Clan was unusually down, which sprouted a restless feeling in Koutarou’s chest. He couldn’t just let her be.

I’ve been feeling like this a lot lately...

Ever since starting school as a third-year this spring, Koutarou had felt the urge to draw Clan and the other girls closer. Youthful folly, however, normally got in the way of expressing that and acting on it.

But this time... he couldn't simply ignore what was right in front of him.

"Don't give up, Clan," he said, continuing to poke Clan's head.

"You wouldn't understand how I feel."

"Maybe not. But I can't stand to see my princess so down in the dumps."

"Veltlion...?"

There, Clan looked up. Koutarou was unable to poke her head now, so he switched to poking her nose instead. Clan raised an eyebrow for a moment, certain he was simply teasing her, but when she saw the look in his eyes... she realized he was dead serious.

"Jeez... I'd have just about anyone else hanged for disrespecting royalty."

"Ooh, how scary."

Clan's experiment was a failure, but that failure ultimately led her to her original objective. Whether or not she realized that, however, was another matter entirely. The only thing for certain was that she was very, very happy right now.

Story 02 — Kiriha Kurano I

Koutarou was a diligent and earnest boy, so even with all the hubbub about Forthorthe, the underground, and Folsaria... he was still doing his best to study for his university entrance exams. He felt like time was running out, but at the moment, he also felt like he had a pretty good chance of getting into his first choice school. If he kept at it, there shouldn't be any issues.

“Hmm...”

Koutarou unconsciously rubbed his shoulders as he worked on solving a physics question. He was an active boy and couldn't help that his upper back got stiff whenever he sat down for long periods of time. It was the price he paid for spending his whole adolescent life working his body rather than his brain. If he were smarter, after all, he wouldn't have to spend so much time studying.

“What's wrong, Koutarou?” Kiriha asked.

She'd just gotten back to room 106 after finishing up shopping for tonight's dinner, and was presently hanging up her coat.

“I'm just stuck on a physics question.”

“Oh?”

Kiriha then walked over and peered at the papers spread out on the table. It only took one glance for her to figure out the solution.

“I think it would be easier to understand if you thought about it using integrals.”

“You mean where I get the area from a graph, right?”

“The question is how you apply that area.”

“Ah, so the area is the actual distance traveled. Thank you.”

Now that Kiriha had helped him see how to find the answer, Koutarou started crunching the numbers. He looked far more serious than usual, though in a different way from when he donned his armor. Kiriha silently stared at him for a while.

“Hmm...”

But when she noticed him rubbing his shoulders again, she got up and moved around behind him.

“Seems your shoulders are stiff.”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. Must be from all the hard work, haha.”

“Heehee. This is where I can really help you.”

“Oh?”

Once she took a seat behind Koutarou, Kiriha started to massage his shoulders.

“How does this feel?”

“It’s great. Thanks.”

Her hands were gentle, but strong. Slowly but surely, she was rubbing away his tension.

“Did you do this for your dad and Kouma-san a lot too?”

Kiriha could do anything, but it was impossible to learn massage without practicing on someone. Koutarou assumed she’d perfected her art on her father and Kouma; she was just that good at it.

“Yes. As a child, there wasn’t much else I could do for them.”

Kiriha had been dexterous ever since she was young, but learning to use kitchen knives and the stove was still out of the question until she reached a certain age. So if she couldn’t cook for her father, she’d believed that backrubs were the least she could do for him.

“That’s pretty noble. All I did when I was a kid was play baseball.”

When Koutarou said that, Kiriha’s hands stopped moving for a moment before she reached out and hugged him from behind.

“...”

There was a reason Koutarou had thrown himself into baseball. Knowing that, Kiriha couldn’t help hugging him like this. She wanted to project warmth into him, to massage his broken heart.

“I’m no match for you, Kiriha-san...” he sighed.

“Until Kii was reunited with her first love, all she could think about was how to make him happy when they were finally together again.”

“Was learning massage part of that?”

“Well... I’m sure she learned it for her father’s sake, but her first love was always on her mind too.”

“Her first love is one lucky guy.”

Kiriha’s first love was none other than Koutarou, but he played the fool. It would be too embarrassing to own up to it right now. The only way he could keep this conversation up was by pretending to talk about someone else.

“I feel the same way. I feel like my feelings have finally reached him, and his me...”

“That’s good to hear.”

Koutarou continued to play the fool as he gently stroked Kiriha’s arms, still wrapped around him. Kiriha wouldn’t press him, however. Respecting his bashfulness was a kindness on her part. Besides, the way he stroked her arms revealed more about his heart than any words possibly could.

Kiriha continued massaging Koutarou’s shoulders for a while longer, but he eventually started to feel like he was taking advantage of her.

“Why don’t I rub your shoulders some too, Kiriha-san?”

His shoulders were stiff from sitting and studying for a day, but Kiriha was downright busy *every* day. He felt it wasn’t fair that he was the only one getting special treatment.

“Oh? I think I’ll take you up on that offer.”

Kiriha couldn’t help smiling. It was an attractive proposal, so she was happy to switch places with Koutarou.

“How does this feel?”

Koutarou knew he was too strong for his own good. He’d once hurt

his father while trying to give him a backrub, so he made sure to be extra gentle with Kiriha.

“You don’t have to be so delicate. You’re not going to break me.”

“O-Okay... Then how about this?”

“That’s perfect. Can you move up to my neck?”

“Like... this?”

“Yes, that feels wonderful. Can you just keep doing that for a while?”

“Sure.”

Once he got a handle on how much strength to use and where to massage, Koutarou got to work. As he’d expected, Kiriha had stiff shoulders too. He could feel the tension in her muscles.

“You’re pretty tense... Are you sure you’re not overdoing things, Kiriha-san?”

As Koutarou rubbed Kiriha’s neck, he began to worry about her. She was extremely precious to him, and he was genuinely concerned about the stress she put herself through.

“Well, it’s true that I have a lot on my plate... but my figure has something to do with it.”

“O-Oh, um, I... I didn’t mean...”

“It’s just the two of us, so you don’t have to worry.”

It was true that Kiriha’s sizeable breasts were partially responsible for her stiff shoulders. Her back bore the weight of her large front load, and Koutarou was embarrassed for not realizing that sooner and making her say it out loud. If any of the other girls were here right now, they’d let him have it.

“I see... I’ll make sure I get the rest of your back too.”

“Heehee, thank you.”

Koutarou’s frozen hands began working again. With Kiriha’s physique, more than just her neck and shoulders were bothering her—it was likely her entire upper back. Fortunately, Koutarou’s baseball

experience came in handy here. Kenji was always the team's pitcher, and Koutarou had often helped him work out sore muscles from throwing.

After a while, however, Koutarou noticed that Kiriha was sniffing. It sounded like she was softly crying.

"Huh? Did I hurt you?"

"No, it's not that... I was just thinking about my mother. This is probably what it would've felt like if she'd rubbed my back for me, and I... I..."

Kiriha was in tears fondly remembering her late mother, whom she'd lost over a decade ago. Koutarou's warm, loving massage was so tender and sweet that it *felt* like love, and Kiriha simply couldn't help thinking of her mother.

"Kiriha-san..."

Suddenly, Koutarou was seized with the urge to hug Kiriha the same way she had for him.

"Koutarou?"

"..."

In the end, however, he simply wrapped his arms around her head.

"Can I ask you something?" she whispered.

"What?" he asked.

"Why my head?"

"You were just talking about your breasts. Do you really think I could hug you properly right now?"

"You're so serious, Satomi Koutarou," Kiriha said with a wry smile, her eyes now dry.

"I just want to do things properly."

Koutarou couldn't let himself get swept away by his impulses, but he also couldn't let Kiriha be. Embracing her head seemed like the best compromise. They sat together in silence for a long moment before Kiriha quietly murmured...

“I love you.”

“Yeah... I know.”

Koutarou continued holding Kiriha for a while longer. At some point, she started to cry again. Koutarou could feel it but did nothing to stop it, for he knew Kiriha's tears weren't tears of sadness.

Story 03 — Koutarou Satomi I

Requested by Mark “Robinxen”

Theia was far from stupid, but she had difficulties when it came to schooling in Japan. She had to relearn history as well as master kanji from scratch; moreover, the numbers, symbols, and denominators used in math were all different. Excelling in academics while adjusting to a completely different culture was an extraordinary challenge. As such, her grades weren't much better than Koutarou's.

“Koutarou, what is this kanji?”

“Oh, that's ‘sardine.’”

“So it's written ‘weak fish’? That's easy to understand.”

“Yeah, it's way easier than something like the kanji for rose.”

“I think that was done to try and prevent aliens from learning the language...”

“I assure you it wasn't personal.”

Since Theia and Koutarou had similar grades, they studied together from time to time. They'd give each other advice, learn things together, and generally help each other out where they were having trouble.

“I take objection to this information. There's no way the line on a graph recording sardine hauls would be this level.”

“Don't sweat the factual details on math questions. They've simplified the graph so that it's easy to understand.”

“That's the kind of complacency that will corrupt the world.”

“This *isn't* a political issue.”

Even though their study sessions were often mutually beneficial, they sometimes turned wildly unproductive. Anything from casual chatter to a fistfight could derail them. The reason was simple: they both had a hard time sitting still for too long. Even now, their focus was waning.

“Why is there even a question about sardine fishing in a math workbook to begin with?”

“It’s just a word problem. They’re testing your ability to pull the relevant information from the text.”

“I, personally, would increase the budget to increase the hauls.”

“Stop trying to solve math with politics.”

“But that’s my area of expertise.”

There, Theia flashed a mighty grin as she took a sip from her cup. She’d stopped to make tea for the two of them once studying began to derail into casual chatter. Koutarou, however, suddenly snickered.

“Heh...”

“Hmm?”

Theia looked up at Koutarou, her lips still on the cup. She looked young to begin with, but the childish gesture made her seem even younger... which only made Koutarou laugh more.

“Hahaha!”

“What are you laughing about?”

Theia set her cup down and puffed up her cheeks in a pout—an extremely childish expression she rarely made outside of room 106.

“Wahahahaha, i-it’s nothing! You just looked so much like Princess Charl, I couldn’t help it! Pfft!”

Koutarou had indeed started laughing because Theia reminded him of an old friend. The way she drank her tea with both her hands on the cup and the childish way she looked at him were identical to Princess Charl’s mannerisms two thousand years ago.

“Do we look that much alike?” Theia asked as she touched her face.

Theia had seen some of Clan’s recordings from past Forthorthe, so she knew what Princess Charl looked like. Nevertheless, she didn’t think they were *that* similar.

“You really do. It’s not in your face, though. It’s in the way you act... It really draws out the similarities in your looks, too.”

“Oh? I don’t really get it... I suppose it’s merely a family resemblance.”

“Perhaps. Maybe it’s just hard to tell now that you’re older, but Clan said she looked exactly like you when you were a kid.”

Theia was growing into a fine young woman, so her face had matured considerably since she was a child. It was perfectly normal that she couldn’t see the same resemblance Clan could.

“So you’re saying Princess Charl and I have similar personalities?” Theia asked.

She’d now taken an interest in the princess who looked like her when she was younger—especially about what she meant to Koutarou.

“This one time Princess Alaia and I were having tea after dinner, Princess Charl came in and demanded some too.”

Koutarou began reminiscing with a nostalgic look on his face. A lot had happened two thousand years ago, but this was undoubtedly a pleasant memory. That much was clear from the sentimental tone of his voice.

“The tea they drank had something like caffeine in it, though, so we couldn’t let Princess Charl have any before bed. But Princess Alaia and I needed it because we still had work to do.”

The scene was still fresh in Koutarou’s mind: Charl was keen on the tea that he and Alaia shared and she didn’t want to be left out, but her looming bedtime was a strong deterrent in their eyes.

“Princess Charl got mad and complained about how it wasn’t fair that she was the only who didn’t get to have any.”

“That sounds like something I might have done when I first came to Earth.”

“Yeah, I can see that. The way she puffed up her cheeks and glared at me... It was just like you two years ago.”

“So, what did you do?”

“Princess Charl climbed up on my lap and refused to get down until she got some tea.”

Koutarou smiled wistfully again. Charl was virtually a permanent

fixture on his lap back then, as if it were a special seat meant just for her. Whenever he sat down, she would come running. Koutarou suspected it was because she saw something of her father in him.

“In that case...”

For some reason, Theia slid her cup over in front of Koutarou.

“Theia?”

Curious about the meaning of the gesture, Koutarou looked over at Theia to discover her crawling towards him.

“Heehee...” Before he could say a word, she climbed into his lap. “Like this?”

“Yup. With exactly that satisfied look on her face, too.”

“This wouldn’t work if I were any taller, you know.”

Proud and pleased, Theia picked her cup back up. She’d moved it ahead of time so that she could still reach it from here.

“You used to throw a fit when anyone brought up how short you are.”

“Just an indication of how much I’ve matured.”

“Is it really mature to sit in someone’s lap like this?”

“Hmm... Let’s just say I’m still maturing and call it a day.”

“That reminds me... Princess Charl was really good at making excuses too. She was a clever girl.”

“And what about me?”

“...You’re just unfair.”

“I’ll take it.”

And so the two of them continued chatting away until they eventually got back to studying. Theia stayed firmly planted in Koutarou’s lap until she was done drinking her tea, however.

Story 04 — Koutarou Satomi II

Requested by Hyperion

A whirling white ball slammed directly into the center of Elexis's mitt as if it had been drawn there. It was a terrifyingly fast straight thrown by none other than Dark Crimson. Not only did she have the strength for powerhouse throws, she's used a gyroball pitch. She was unmistakably a force to be reckoned with on the baseball field.

"Strike!" Elfaria, serving as the umpire, shouted in a clear voice.

Crimson's pitch came in low on the outside corner. It was a tricky spot to hit, and Koutarou knew he didn't stand a chance against it.

"I'm surprised *you're* not the one out there pitching," Koutarou cajoled.

"Hahaha, if anything goes, then it's best if I let the girls handle things," Elexis laughed.

Elexis was quite athletic and dexterous, so Koutarou had expected he would be pitching. But to his surprise, Dark Crimson took the mound at the start of the game and Elexis instead picked up a catcher's mitt.

"This arrangement leaves you to do all the clever scheming, huh?" Crimson jeered.

"You could say that," said Elexis with a smirk.

"That's creepy, Elexis. You're making it sound like you think I'm stupid," Crimson said with a frown.

"Oh, not at all. I just wanted you to be able to focus on pitching," Elexis replied as he tossed the ball back to Crimson.

With everyone chitchatting as they played, they were running over time—not that anyone was particularly perturbed by that. When it came to grass-lot baseball, having fun was far more important than formalities.

"I don't buy that one bit, Elexis," Crimson muttered in an

aggravated tone and snatched the ball out of the air.

Crimson disliked Elexis's propensity for underhanded tactics, although she didn't actually dislike him personally. Maya, the shortstop, felt the same way.

"But if anything goes... You can do your worst too, can't you, Crimson?" she asked almost tauntingly.

"You betcha! You don't need to hold back either!" Crimson rallied, holding her hand out in front of her.

Red light began radiating from her entire arm—a telltale sign she was preparing an attack.

"The first pitch is always a freebie! The *real* game starts here!"

The rules for today's match were simple: anything goes. They'd be playing a standard game, but everyone was free to use their own abilities. In Crimson's case, that meant magic. And when Koutarou saw what she had up her sleeve, he began strengthening his body via his borrowed psychic powers.

"Taaake thiiiiis!"

Crimson hurled the ball with all her strength. It looked like it was high on the inside corner this time—a somewhat reckless pitch barreling straight for Koutarou's head.

"Whoa!"

The ball was glowing with red magic, and Koutarou knew he'd be in trouble if it hit him. Fortunately, Koutarou's enhanced eyes were able to determine the ball's trajectory. He reacted swiftly, leaning backwards to avoid a direct hit.

"Ball!"

The ball sailed by Koutarou's head and landed firmly in Elexis's glove, which had been enchanted to nullify magic ahead of time. That meant once the ball was in the catcher's hands, it was nothing more than a normal baseball again.

"Hey, Crimson! That coulda killed me!"

Crimson had cleverly moved from an outside throw to an inside one, and her intention was obvious. In order to hit pitches to the outer

corner, you see, the batter needed to lean into home plate. Standing so close to the plate, however, put the batter at risk of getting hit by the ball. And with offensive magic cast on the ball, the batter was under more pressure than ever.

“So what? You know what I’m aiming for, so I have to use the mechanics of baseball against you!”

Crimson knew what she’d done was dangerous. But she also knew that Koutarou scoring a homerun was a foregone conclusion if she didn’t go all out. Since he could read the course of the ball with his psychic powers, she needed to play aggressively to keep him from hitting it at all. In other words, she was turning this from a game of skill into a game of chicken. Luckily, however, Koutarou’s powers gave him the foresight he needed to dodge Crimson’s deadly pitches.

“If you do that against Aika-san, I’m gonna get mad.”

“Oh, don’t worry. You’re special. I’m saving this little trick just for you!”

“Does that mean I’m not special, Crimson?” Maki, who was waiting on-deck, asked with a teasing grin.

“You... You’re surprisingly unpleasant these days, Maki,” Crimson retorted.

“Really? I’m glad. I worked hard to make sure of that.”

“Sheesh...” Crimson sighed as Elexis tossed the ball back to her once more.

All of a sudden, two spells came flying at Koutarou from the bench—Yurika and Harumi’s way of showing their support.

“Satomi-san, I cast protective magic on you! You can just think of it as a normal ball now!”

“Yurika, that kind of pitch is dangerous even *with* a normal ball.”

“Satomi-kun, I cast a spell on your bat. You should be able to use it at full power now.”

“Thank you, Sakuraba-senpai! This’ll be a great help!”

Yurika had cast a defensive spell on Koutarou, while Harumi cast an offensive one on his bat. Between the two, Koutarou was now

equipped to deal with Crimson.

“All right, I’ve decided on my next pitch!”

“Bring it!”

Koutarou squared off against Crimson once more. Crimson brandished her glowing red arm, tossing another deadly ball... but this one was different from before.

“This ball has five times the cuteness!” Dark Orange shouted from second base.

She’d cast her own spell on Crimson’s pitch, and sure enough, the ball was sailing through the air with an orange light trailing behind it.

“What?!”

Koutarou had no idea what Orange had done. More specifically, he didn’t have any time to think about it. The ball was coming too fast and he needed to take a swing.

“Wait, no! This is—”

Orange’s spell activated just as the ball was within Koutarou’s reach. It greatly increased the ball’s air resistance, effectively slamming on the brakes and giving it an erratic flightpath.

“It went from a fastball to a knuckleball?!”

Between his physical abilities and psychic powers, Koutarou just barely managed to make contact with the ball. The wild hit turned it into a high flyball, headed for right field.

“Second!” Dark Purple called from first base.

“Wait, it’s mine?!” Orange shouted back in disbelief.

She was a little slow on the draw after casting her spell, leaving her in a poor position to catch anything. The ball sailed right over her head. Things were looking good for Koutarou.

“Don’t worry. Leave it to me.”

At least, they were until Nana made a play. She dashed out from right field and caught the wild hit with a slide. As expected of a veteran magical girl, her instincts, reflexes, and reaction time were all

incredible.

“Tch...” Koutarou clicked his tongue.

“Too bad, Koutarou-kun. You would have had it if it weren’t for Nana-san,” Elexis offered in consolation.

“Having her on your team is cheating to begin with.”

“Give us a break, Koutarou-kun. We didn’t have enough people.”

“Yeah, yeah. It’s fine. We’ll just have to have our rising star, Aika-san, step up to bat.”

“Heehee, I’ll do my best.”

Maki took the plate after Koutarou. Her matchup with Crimson would be a fated showdown between old friends and rivals.

The entire game was a constant back-and-forth with each side taking the lead from the other. But in the end, Sanae’s “astral project and run” tactic clenched the win for Koutarou’s team.

“What a dream game...”

Though he’d lost, Elexis was satisfied with the day’s game after giving it his all. Koutarou felt the same way, but Elexis’s particular choice of words struck him.

“A dream...? That’s right...”

Koutarou came to realize that this was indeed a dream game. It had to be, for the real Elexis and Maya had gone missing during the battle against Vandarion.

“Oh? What’s this, Koutarou-kun? Are you worried about us?”

“At least in my dreams. We won, you know.”

“Kind words. I’m happy.”

“Would the real you feel the same way?”

“At the very least, I would be overjoyed to see you again. We’d be able to settle our own score then.”

“That’s true. I hadn’t thought about it like that.”

While this was only a dream in the end, Koutarou wasn’t sad. He now knew that all manner of worlds existed.

“Well then... see you later, Koutarou-kun.”

“Yeah. See you, Elexis.”

And so Koutarou and Elexis parted ways with a smile, both of them looking forward to the day they could play against each other again.

Story 05 — Koutarou Satomi III

Requested by Crusaderboy

It had taken over 567 million time loops for Koutarou to obtain the true sword of sovereignty with all nine colors. Factoring in converging and diverging timelines, countless worlds had been created along the way. Among them were worlds similar to the first and 567 millionth, but no two were quite exactly the same. Some were dramatically different, even, including some where all nine girls had no special powers whatsoever.

“Heya!” Sanae shouted as she jumped on her old friend.

“Good morning, Sanae,” Koutarou greeted her like nothing was amiss.

Sanae had been this way since elementary school, so her behavior was no surprise to him. He’d long given up trying to fight it. All he thought now when she jumped on him was, “*Typical Sanae.*”

“Good morning, Koutarou.”

“Did you do your homework?”

“Yup. Dunno if it’s right or wrong, though.”

“That’s fine.”

“Don’t worry! You can trust me. We’re childhood friends, after all.”

“That’s exactly why I *can’t* trust you.”

“Ugh, it’s rude to bring up a lady’s past.”

Sanae wriggled as she complained, but Koutarou was unmoving. It would take more than Sanae to topple the prefectural homerun king.

“Good morning!”

It was then that their classmate and mutual friend Nijino Yurika happened to pass by. She wasn’t just carrying her schoolbag, but a cardboard box as well.

“Oh? This is pretty early for you, Yurika. And what’s with the box?”

“The 24-hour supermarket had a sale this morning to clear out inventory!”

“Ah, so those are your spoils.”

“Let’s see what you’ve got in there... Butter and soy sauce flavored instant ramen? You went and bought instant noodles again?”

“I don’t have a choice. My new costume is getting expensive.”

Upon entering high school, Yurika had taken an interest in cosplay. She’d actually built up quite a following, but serious cosplay was an expensive hobby. She had to pay for her costumes out of pocket, which often meant dipping into her food budget for the month.

“Wow... I can even smell the stuff on you.”

“What, really? Oh, huh... You’re right. She does kind of smell like artificial flavoring.”

“Nooooo!”

In this world, Koutarou, Sanae, and Yurika had all known each other since elementary school. Yurika was honestly grateful to have close friends who would tell her when she stunk... but she hated the idea that she stunk of ramen.

Shizuka was the landlord of the apartment building where Koutarou lived, but lately they’d only been running into each other at school. Shizuka was part of both the karate club and the home ec club, so she ran a busy schedule—particularly with a karate tournament coming up.

“That’s why Yurika-chan is so down, huh? You really can’t say stuff like that to girls, Satomi-kun.”

“What? Sanae said it first.”

“Eeheehee...”

“Even so, hearing it from a boy is especially painful.”

Koutarou, Sanae, and Yurika met Shizuka in high school after

Koutarou moved into Corona House. His parents had moved out of town when his father was suddenly transferred, and Koutarou had stayed behind in Kisshouharukaze City to attend high school. His mother wanted to stay with him at first, but ultimately decided Koutarou's inept father needed her more. Koutarou had plenty of friends to help him out, so she was sure she was leaving him in good hands.

"Being too honest is one of Koutarou's flaws, but I would hate to see him become as silver-tongued as Kenji," Kiriha said with a smile and a shrug.

Kiriha had moved to the area as a high school student, but she'd known Koutarou and the others since they were little. She had family in Kisshouharukaze City, so she was often in town.

"Don't say that, Kurano-san!" Kenji pleaded.

"If you don't like hearing it, I suggest you change your ways, Matsudaira Kenji," Kiriha scolded.

"I'd do anything for you, Kurano-san!"

"How many girls have you fed that line?"

"Urk..."

Incidentally, Kenji was currently trying to woo Kiriha. She had her guard up, however, and Kenji had yet to make it out of the friend zone. Ultimately, he was no match for Kiriha.

"Isn't Yurika the real problem here? You are what you eat, after all," Maki said bluntly.

As a close friend of Yurika's, she couldn't help being brutally honest either. As far as she was concerned, the real problem was indeed Yurika.

"Oh yeah, Maki is in the same situation, yet..." Theia mused as she leaned over and sniffed Maki. "I don't smell instant noodles, but something faintly floral... You're using essential oils, aren't you?"

Maki was in the cosclub with Yurika, so they shared a similar financial burden in their craft. But rather than smelling of instant noodles, Maki smelled of flowers. So, from Maki's point of view, Yurika was at fault for that.

“You can tell?” Maki asked.

“Yes, my mother’s into herbs and teas and that kind of thing,” Theia explained.

“I see.”

“What about you?”

“Herbs and fortune-telling are kind of my hobby...”

“That sounds perfectly in character for a magical girl cosplayer.”

Maki dabbled a little in the occult, and made things like her own perfume out of herbs and oils as a hobby. That was the scent Theia had detected.

“Your Highness, smelling a person’s clothing is a breach of manners.”

“I know that. You’re always so stiff, Ruth...”

“If I don’t say it, nobody will!”

Theia was a princess from a small country in Europe, and Ruth was her faithful attendant. Theia’s mother, Elfaria, had long anguished over what her daughter’s extreme personality would mean for her future prospects and ultimately decided to send her overseas for her own good. She’d since started to mellow out some, so Elfaria’s plan could be considered a tentative success.

“What if I say it instead, then? You hack princess!” chimed in Koutarou.

“What did you just say?! Come over here so I can cut you down!” Theia roared.

“Your Highness, calm down!” Ruth pleaded.

“You have no jurisdiction here in Japan!”

“If you think I’m any less of a threat on foreign soil, brace yourself!”

“You wanna go?!”

Koutarou and Theia’s spat escalated into a full-blown fistfight,

though their watchful friends didn't seem to think much of it. You see, the two of them fighting was a frequent occurrence. Not even Ruth lifted a finger to stop them. Everyone knew by now that it was simply best to let them work things out on their own.

Despite the bump on Koutarou's head and the blue circles around his eyes, Harumi wasn't alarmed in the slightest. She simply and calmly pulled out her first aid kit. Clan, on the other hand, was terribly worried.

"Are you okay? Does it hurt?"

"I told you I was fine."

"You certainly don't look like it."

Clan stared at Koutarou's bruised face in flustered concern. She didn't try to get any closer or assist him, however. Seeing her like this, Koutarou could understand why her family had sent her abroad too. She was just too sheltered.

"Heehee. Why don't we treat him together, Clan-san?" Harumi offered.

"Y-You want me to help?!" Clan stammered.

"You're worried about him, aren't you?"

"..."

"Well, what do you say?"

"I-I'll give it a try."

With a do-or-die spirit—not that it was necessary—Clan nodded and left the room to dampen the towel Harumi had handed her.

"Is Clan-san that reserved around you too, Satomi-kun?" Harumi asked.

Once Clan was gone, Harumi took the opportunity to ask Koutarou about her. Clan had transferred to their school not long after Theia, and Koutarou had volunteered to look after her as a new student. He'd even introduced her to the knitting society.

"She talks a little more when it's just the two of us. I think she gets

kind of nervous around people she doesn't know as well."

"I'm glad she has somebody she can talk with."

Harumi was worried that Clan was always withdrawn and alone, but that fortunately didn't seem to be the case thanks to Koutarou. Relief put a smile on her face.

"I-I'm back!"

Clan returned to the knitting society club room with a damp towel in hand, but stopped short a few steps in front of Koutarou.

"Stop hesitating and just do it," he complained.

"Y-You're a terrible patient!" she complained in turn.

But in spite of her protest, Clan stepped forward and used the towel to wipe off Koutarou's face.

"Ow. That hurts, Clan."

"I don't care! You just sit still!"

"Heehee, so *this* is what the two of you are like together."

Harumi couldn't help giggling at the heartwarming sight. Clan quickly grew bashful and pulled her hand away from Koutarou's face as she blushed.

"Come on, it's way too late to put on airs now," Koutarou teased.

"No one asked you!" Clan retorted.

"Heehee, maybe I should follow your example, Clan-san," Harumi giggled.

"Owowow! You're doing that on purpose, aren't you, Sakuraba-senpai?!"

"Yes, I am."

"Aarrghhh!"

Lively chatter could be heard from the knitting society club room until the sun set that evening.

Koutarou and the girls might be without special abilities in this world, but their daily lives were still largely the same. Their powers, you see, weren't nearly as important as the bond they all shared.

Story 06 — Maki Aika I

Earlier this spring, Maki had taken in a kitten. While she was taking care of it, however, she was letting it do as it pleased. It could leave anytime it wanted; it had just shown no inclination to do so as of yet. It seemed the cat had taken a liking to Maki, so it was staying near her.

“He’s soooooo cute!”

“What’s his name, Aika-senpai?!”

“Snoozy. His father’s name was Dozy.”

“A great addition to the family!”

Snoozy’s arrival in Maki’s life had a big influence on the cosclub, too. Characters with feline sidekicks were popular in anime nowadays, so by giving Snoozy his own costume, he could cosplay with them. Fortunately he was used to the handmade outfits Harumi dressed him in, so the leap to cosplay was an easy one.

“Why not go all out for *Cat Express*?”

“If we modify the outfit to hide his spots, he might look like a black cat.”

“That’s true... But I’d feel bad if we covered his face, so let’s leave it as it is.”

“Hey, it looks like we have Dorothy’s outfit in storage! Come here, Aika-san!”

“O-Okay!”

“Meow?”

“You stay here, Snoozy.”

“Meow...”

Snoozy instinctively tried to follow after Maki, who was whisked away to try on a costume. When Maki stopped him, however, he obediently sat down and waited. His adorable behavior melted the

hearts of the cosclub members instantly.

“Awwwww!” the girls all squealed in unison.

The cat in question, however, paid them no mind. He simply curled up on the spot, intent to take a nap until Maki returned.

Cosplay events were often outdoor, so the cosclub wanted to bring Snoozy with them whenever and wherever the rules allowed. They didn’t want to cause any trouble, however, so they decided they should add a leash to Snoozy’s outfits to make sure he didn’t get away from them. As long as Maki was holding the other end, they were sure there wouldn’t be any problems.

“Mrooow!”

Snoozy let out a big yawn. His primary concern was when Maki would come back. He didn’t particularly care for the discussion about future events and his costumes.

“Meow?”

Snoozy’s ears suddenly perked up as he looked over to the door. It opened to reveal Maki, who was now wearing a witch’s outfit straight out of a picture book.

“Meow!”

The moment Maki stepped inside, Snoozy leaped up and off the table in a beeline for his owner.

“Awwwww!” the girls all squealed again.

Snoozy ignored them as he dashed off.

“Oh? What is it, Snoozy?” Maki asked.

She couldn’t help smiling as the cat bounded toward her. But...

“...Meow.”

He suddenly stopped two meters away.

“Snoozy?”

He seemed to be smelling something, but Maki didn’t understand

what or why.

“Mrrrow.”

“Ahaha, what a good nose you have, Snoozy.”

The girl who’d helped Maki change, however, seemed to know exactly what was going on. She had cats of her own, so she recognized this behavior.

“What do you mean?” Maki asked.

“Snoozy doesn’t like the way the outfit smells. It’s probably either the scent of whoever wore it last or the scent of the mothballs,” she explained.

“Oh!”

That made sense to Maki. Cosclub outfits were washed and kept in storage after they were worn, but Snoozy’s feline nose could detect both the scent of the previous wearer and the mothballs used in the storage closet—neither of which he was fond of.

“Please just bear with it until we’re done, Snoozy,” Maki said apologetically.

She couldn’t take off the outfit until they were done with the fitting, but explaining that to a cat was difficult. He’d just have to put up with the smell until it was all over.

“Mrow...”

Snoozy simply stared at Maki and kept his distance. It seemed he *really* didn’t like the smell.

Maki didn’t get to change back into her normal clothes until about an hour later. The person who’d worn the witch outfit last was far more petite than Maki, meaning the sleeves and skirt were much too short for her. Maki looked like she’d crammed herself into a child’s costume, so it would need to be modified before she could wear it properly. Once the club was done with her fitting, however, she finally got to take it off and hand it over to the club’s ace seamstress.

“Thank you,” Maki said.

“Just leave it to me!” she proclaimed. “I’ll finish it up nicely!”

The girl took the costume from Maki with a confident grin on her face. She was also a member of the sewing club, so she was quite skilled with a needle and thread. Getting some length on sleeves and a skirt would be a breeze.

“Now, Aika-san, I believe someone’s been waiting for you,” she then said, pointing behind Maki.

“Meow!” a shrill cry followed.

Even though Maki had changed clothes, Snoozy was reluctant to get any closer while she was still holding the costume. The moment she handed it over to her fellow club member, however, he came running.

But just to be sure, he stopped two meters away and began sniffing at the air.

“It’s okay now, Snoozy. I’ve already taken it off.”

“Meow!”

Once he was convinced, he dashed over to Maki like a bullet.

“Oh?”

He then climbed into her outstretched arms and clung to Maki like he was trying to hug her.

“Meow!”

“Heehee... Gosh, you’re so spoiled.”

Maki held Snoozy with both arms, and he rubbed his head against her chest in turn. After cuddling for a little while, he settled down and promptly fell asleep. He seemed perfectly satisfied now that he’d at last been reunited with Maki.

“I’ve gotta say, Aika-san, you give off a totally different aura now that you’ve got that cat.”

“What? Really?”

“Yeah. The guys in my class keep pestering me to introduce them to you.”

“But I—”

“Don’t worry. I turned them all down.”

“R-Right. Thank you.”

“...Mrow?”

“It’s okay, Snoozy. You can go back to sleep.”

“Meow.”

“See? It’s like you’ve got this sweet, gentle side now. Guys really eat that up, Aika-san.”

It was true that Snoozy and Dozy had changed Maki—outwardly, anyway. Her heart was steadfast.

“There’s only one person I love. And that’s never going to change,” she declared proudly.

“You’re gonna break a lot of boys’ hearts saying that, Aika-san...”

Maki loved the boy who’d opened up a new world for her. Even the two cats in her life now were thanks to that. And because of them, her smile was brighter than ever before.